HELP WHEN DADS NEED SOMEBODY? FOLLOWER REACTIONS TO LEADER WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

JAMIE L. GLOOR
Business School, University of Exeter, Rennes Dr., Exeter England EX4 4PU
Business Administration, University of Zurich, Plattenstr. 14 Zurich Switzerland 8032

SUSANNE BRAUN
Durham University

ABSTRACT

Perceptions of others' work-family conflict (WFC) have typically been studied as a top-down phenomenon grounded in gender role theory. This work has consistently revealed negative career consequences for followers whom leaders judge to have higher WFC, particularly female followers. However, we know less about the conditions under which those lower in organizational hierarchies (e.g., followers) notice and respond to leaders' WFC–including male leaders–and if these perceptions predict behavioral outcomes. Integrating insights from social exchange and motivation theories, we propose that followers perceive leaders' WFC, responding to it positively and prosocially with extra effort to help them at work; we also test if these patterns differ by leader gender. Results from a field study and two experiments generally supported our predictions, showing that followers reported more prosocial motivation and performed more extra effort and help towards female (vs. male) leaders, although leader overtime increased perceptions of male leaders' WFC, closing this gender gap. This research highlights a new behavioral bonus wherein leaders' ostensibly negative state–WFC–elicits positive behavioral effects in the form of extra effort and help from their followers (Study 1) and lower-level evaluators (Study 3).

INTRODUCTION

Employees not only notice and consider their own work-family conflict (WFC, "a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect," Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77), but employees also observe and interpret their colleagues' WFC. To date, this work has focused on leaders' perceptions of followers' WFC with the principle finding being that leaders' perceptions of followers' WFC have detrimental implications–especially for female followers. Specifically, this literature has focused on leaders' perceptions of followers' WFC as disadvantageous to followers' career outcomes, such that these perceptions predict lower performance and promotability ratings for followers, as well as fewer nominations for and actual promotions (Carlson, Witt, Zivnuska, Kacmar, & Grzywacz, 2008; Hoobler, Wayne, & Lemmon, 2009; Li, Bagger, & Cropanzano, 2017; Marhaeni, Sudibia, Wirathi, & Rustariyuni, 2014). In sum, when leaders ascribe higher WFC to their female followers, they see them as less of a fit with what it takes to succeed in their role and in their organization (Hoobler et al., 2009).

This literature has been useful in informing work-family, gender and diversity, and careers scholars about the power of others' perceptions of WFC to influence focal employees' workplace outcomes. Yet, our understanding of these phenomena remains limited in three ways. First, the empirical work in this area has largely tested leaders' perceptions of followers' WFC as a downward influence of the leader on the follower in the typical direction of power relations (Dosier, Case, & Keys, 1988), also termed authority ranking relationships (Fiske, 1991, 1992). What we know less about is whether these perceptions

have similarly detrimental effects on the perceived individual when the power dynamics are changed or even reversed (see Martinez, Kane, Ferris, & Brooks, 2012), namely, when the perceiver is the follower who is observing their leader's WFC. Second, this work has largely been based in gender role theory, the idea that when we know of others' caregiving roles (e.g., family-to-work conflict) this is a mismatch with leader prototypes and ideal worker norms (Acker, 1990; Blair-Loy, 2003; Reid, 2015; Schein, Mueller, Lituchy, & Liu, 1996). So, for people viewed as having significant caregiving roles–traditionally women–negative workplace implications should result from perceptions of WFC. Because these findings were based on largely attitudinal outcomes (e.g., career commitment and promotability ratings), however, we know less about the conditions under which others' WFC perceptions may affect positive or behavioral outcomes in leader-follower relationships. Thus, we integrate motivation literature (e.g., Grant, 2007; Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005), proposing that leaders' WFC increases followers' prosocial motivation to help them. Third, this body of literature has focused on career outcomes of others' perceptions of WFC. Applying new theories to these phenomena can help us expand existing knowledge to understand–beyond career outcomes and cognition–whether observers' behavioral consequences may result from perceptions of others' WFC. To do this, we draw on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964, Gouldner, 1960) to predict that when leaders are ascribed higher WFC (as opposed to lower WFC), this prompts followers to respond positively with extra effort at work, because they want to help these leaders.

Perceptions of others' WFC have been called a modern, subtler form of workplace gender bias because others (both men and women) assume women experience greater WFC even when they may self-report less WFC than men (see Byron, 2005; Hoobler et al., 2009). Indeed, working mothers are typically viewed as being in a state of constant conflict between work and family domains (see Hoobler et al., 2009; Padavic, Ely, & Reid, 2019; Williams, Berdahl, & Vandello, 2016), and motherhood penalties are often incurred even if women do not (yet) have children (Gloor, Li, Lim, & Feierabend, 2018a). While we know that women commonly experience career decrements because of others' perceptions of their WFC, the current research examines whether behavioral consequences may result and if the same fate befalls men. However, in contrast to much of this literature, we propose that leaders experience positive–rather than negative–outcomes (i.e., follower prosocial motivation, extra effort and help towards their leaders) based on these same perceptions by others.

In summary, current knowledge about how employees notice and react to others' WFC has largely been limited to supervisors' perceptions and its effects on (female) employees' careers. By employing motivation and social exchange theories—frameworks not commonly used in the work-family literature—the current research extends knowledge in terms of how WFC perceptions may implicate men, leaders, as well as have behavioral consequences. We test the idea that WFC is positively reciprocated in the form of followers' extra effort, that is, additional energy expended on their job tasks (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993; 1997). In three studies, we test our complete conceptual model with a mixed methods program of research involving a field study (Study 1) and two experiments (Studies 2-3).

Leader Gender and Work-Family Conflict

Employees experience WFC when the work and family domains are viewed as incompatible in some way (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Earlier research has examined leaders' perceptions of followers' WFC (e.g., Carlson et al., 2008; Hoobler et al., 2009; Li et al., 2017). However, we believe followers likely notice and form judgements about leaders' WFC as well. Not only is the leader a salient person in followers' work lives (Sparrowe, Soetjipto, & Kraimer, 2006) but leader-follower relationships are one of the most salient

social relations in organizations (see Martin, Guillaume, Thomas, Lee, & Epitropaki, 2016, for a review). But how might follower perceptions of leaders' WFC differ by leader gender?

We explore the idea that leader gender shapes follower perceptions of WFC, based in gender role theory (Eagly, 1987). Gender roles are "consensual beliefs about the attributes of men and women" (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 574). The historical distribution of men and women into social roles as breadwinners and homemakers has contributed to gender differences in the perceived skills, beliefs, and attitudes of men and women, stereotypes and expectations of men and women, as well as men and women's actual behaviors. Most relevant here are the role-based stereotypes and expectations of men and women. Because people selectively pay attention to, interpret, and recall information through stereotype-based lenses–including but not exclusive to gender stereotypes (Ellemers, 2018; Heilman, 2012)–followers' perceptions of the same behavior may differ depending on whether a male or a female leader is being observed. We particularly propose that followers' perceptions of female leaders' WFC are likely to be salient, in part, because the aforementioned associations between femininity and family are pervasive, long-standing, and deep-seeded (see Eagly, Nater, Miller, Kaufmann, & Sczesny, 2019). Together with social norms that continue to encourage women to place more emphasis on family and their family roles (while men are encouraged to emphasize career and professional roles; see Dumas & Stanko, 2017; Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 2012), simply being a women could trigger stronger connections with family–and also WFC–when a female leader is being observed compared with a male leader.

The Moderating Role of Leader Work Time

Although we have largely argued for a main effect of leader gender on follower perceptions of leader WFC, we can further increase our theoretical precision by incorporating a highly relevant moderator: work time. Weekly work hours have drastically increased over the last century in industrialized countries (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018, Padavic et al., 2019; ten Brummelhuis, Rothbard, & Uhrich, 2017; Williams et al., 2016); work time is also positively associated with emloyees' perceptions of WFC (Major, Klein, & Ehrhart, 2002). However, the major increases in work hours have not been contractual in terms of the baseline work week, but instead, are largely comprised by overtime hours. Because the average overtime for highly skilled professionals in Germany–the context of the current research–is approximately 5 hours per week (Kaiser, 2019), at that point, we predict a shift in perceptions of male leaders' WFC. By putting forth more than the average expected time at work–and then also extra overtime, leaders may not only personally experience more WFC, but particularly male leaders may also feel freer to engage with their family and caregiving roles without stigma or backlash (Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Rudman & Mescher, 2013) because they have already fulfilled their gender *and* professional role expectations as the "breadwinner" and "ideal worker" (Haines & Stroessner, 2019). This may lead to more visible, noticeable WFC for male leaders, closing the gender gap in ascribed WFC at about 45 working hours per week.

Prosocial Motivation, Follower Extra Effort and Help Towards Leaders

Peoples' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are induced by the presence of and interactions with others (Allport, 1985; Bandura, 1986). Because one of the most salient social relations in organizations is the leader-follower relationship (see meta-analysis by Martin et al., 2016, for a review), a follower's relationship with a leader plays an important role in organizing information about the leader (Campbell, Ward, Sonnenfeld, & Agle, 2008). Status differences between leaders and followers in the organizational hierarchy "provide the contextual backdrop…for interpersonal perception and behavior" (Campbell et al., 2008, p.

16). Leaders' higher status means they are listened to more (e.g., Ridgeway & Walker, 1995), and–chiefly important to our theorizing–also receive more interpersonal support and helping from lower status followers (Van der Vegt, Bunderson, & Oosterhof, 2006).

Social exchange theory concerns transactions of resources between persons within social structures (Blau, 1964, Gouldner, 1960). It is based on the concept of reciprocation and is often used to explain why followers exert effort toward their leaders and organizations (see Henderson, Liden, Glibkowski, & Chaudhry, 2009). Socio-emotional resources in leader-follower exchanges include resources such as commitment to the leader and organization, trust and loyalty towards leaders (Braun et al., 2012), as well as taking care of one another (Kuvaas, Buch, Dysvik, & Haerem, 2012). Both male and female leaders are higher status than followers, a relationship Fiske (1991, 1992) calls an authority ranking relationship; in such relationships, exchanges generally create greater benefits for the higher-power partner. We argue that a follower is not only quite attentive to the leader's demands and challenges (e.g., their WFC; Kossek et al., 2018; ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), but they will also be attuned to the leader's socio-emotional needs in exchange relationships.

Prosocial motivation refers to the desire to expend effort based on a concern for helping or contributing to other people (Grant, 2007). As an other-focused psychological process, prosocial motivation directs employees' attention towards others' perspectives, including what might be useful for others (Grant & Berry, 2011). Although prosocial motivation can serve multiple goals (e.g., helping others because they care about them, because they feel it is the right thing to do, because they wish to maintain membership in a valued group, or because it will make them feel good about themselves; Batson, Ahmad, Powell, & Stocks, 2008), the precise mechanism is less relevant to the current research. Instead, we argue more generally that prosocial motivation is a psychological state wherein followers are focused on the goal of benefiting others, in this case, their leaders. Indeed, relevant research has shown that prosocial motivation in this general form is associated with higher job performance, personal initiative, and organizational citizenship behaviors such as helping colleagues (De Dreu & Nauta, 2009). Thus, if followers perceive their leader is experiencing WFC, followers may be more motivated to help the leaders because their help might be useful for the leader, thereby also expending more extra effort in their work tasks in ways that would help their leader. In doing so, followers contribute via the means available to them to help leaders who experience high WFC.

However, as previously argued, followers' prosocial motivation towards leaders experiencing WFC–and thus also their extra effort to help them–differs by leader gender and work time. Thus, we propose a conditional indirect effect model (i.e., a first-stage moderated mediation) whereby the path from the independent variable to the mediator is moderated.

STUDY 1 METHODS & RESULTS

We examined 676 German professionals (46% male) who reported about their leaders (67.2% of whom were men; two-thirds had children; 84.9% were in a partnership or married; evenly distributed across lower: 22.8%, middle: 36.1%, and upper management: 41.1%).

We asked followers about their leaders' working hours: "As your own estimate, approximately how many hours does your leader work per week?" (range 20-87, M = 39.67, SD = 4.56). We then divided this by 5 to approximate the scaling of our other variables and mean-centered it. Followers also reported their leader's gender, which was dichotomously coded, because no participants selected our third, "other/please indicate" option (male = 0, female = 1). Followers rated two items about their leaders' WFC (Seiger & Wiese, 2009), selected to reflect leaders' external (time-based) and internal (emotional) WFC. These items were rated on a 7-point scale, "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" (α = .75). Followers

rated three items about their extra effort at work (validated by Felfe & Goihl, 2002), which were rated on a 5-point scale (α = . 94). Finally, we also included a number of controls, based on theoretical and empirical grounds (e.g., participant gender, leader number of children).

We used SEM in Stata 14.2 to analyze the direct and indirect effects of leader gender and leader WFC on follower extra effort towards leaders. Leader gender (b = .287, z = 3.15, p = .002) and leader work hours (b = .299, z = 2.54, p = .011) were significantly associated with leader WFC. However, these main effects were qualified by an interaction (b = -.472, z = -3.21, p = .001), such that for female leaders, leader WFC was generally stable and higher than male leaders until working hours reached approximately 40 – 45 hours per week. Leader WFC (b = .138, z = 4.32, p < .001) was also positively associated with extra effort. Mediation analyses revealed a small, positive effect of work time for female leaders (estimate = .041, z = 2.48, 95% CI_{bc} = [-.0001, .104]); yet, this effect was stronger for male leaders (estimate = .142, z = 2.75, 95% CI_{bc} = [.037, .334]; contrast = -.101, z = 2.36, 95% CI = [.017, .185]).

STUDY 2 METHODS & RESULTS

As a next step, we tested our results via an experiment to eliminate alternative explanations by providing causal results and replicating the first stage of our model. Then, in Study 3, we manipulate the mediator in a causal chain design (e.g., see Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005) to replicate the final stage of our model from the field study (Study 1).

We tested 230 working adults in Germany via Prolific Academic. Most (68.3%) were men, 11.7% had children, and all had some work experience (M = 6.96 years, SD = 17.58).

Participants were randomly assigned to 1 of 4 conditions in a 2 (leader work hours: average/overtime) X 2 (leader gender: male/female) between-subjects design. Stimuli were developed as articles from a well-regarded, widely read German publication, describing a leader (i.e., a VP of a well-known company), his/her comments on work and life (e.g., "I have to work at least 40/55 hours a week in the office…but the children are only young once, and I cannot get these moments back."), and reasons for not having enough family time (e.g., "I and/or my partner work too much"). Checks showed the manipulations were successful.

We manipulated leaders working hours as average (40 hours) or overtime (55 hours) hours, coded as 0 and 1, based on Study 1 results to be on both sides of the interaction crux. We also manipulated leader gender via name (e.g., Stefan/Michael or Stefanie/Nicole for a male or a female leader, coded 0 and 1) and gendered pronouns. We used the same two items to measure leaders' perceived WFC as in Study 1 (α = . 73).

We used Generalized SEM (gSEM), which revealed main effects of leader gender (b = .38, z = 2.48, p = .013) and leader work hours (b = .33, z = 2.08, p = .038) on leader WFC. But these were qualified by an interaction, such that working overtime increased perceptions of male leaders' WFC (contrast = .38, z = 2.48, p = .013), but did not affect perceptions of female leaders' WFC (contrast = -.14, p = .375). These results causally replicate Study 1.

STUDY 3 METHODS & RESULTS

As in Study 2, we recruited 502 employed German adults via Prolific (58.7% men; M = 6.18 years of work experience). Participants were randomly assigned to view 1 of the 4 conditions in a between-subjects design (leader WFC: high/low, leader gender: male/female). Stimuli were developed and coded as in Study 2; checks indicated successful manipulations.

We adapted a 5-item measure of prosocial motivation from Grant (2008) by adding the specific anchor, " this leader", e.g., "How motivated are you to help *this leader*?" (measured from 1 to 7; α = .86). We then told participants that the leader they just read about was looking for people to join their team. To measure extra effort, we asked participants if

they were willing to read the job advertisement (coded yes/no) and if they would provide feedback (i.e., how to make the advertisement better and/or more attractive) in an open-ended text field. We also counted the number of characters and words in the feedback participants provided in the open-ended text field, with higher numbers indicating more effort. Because these two items had high skew (4.73 – 5.13) and kurtosis (37.85 – 46.62), and their range was also much larger than the two dichotomous measures of extra effort towards leaders, we standardized and log-transformed these values, and then added 2. Finally, we created a 4-item composite scale by taking the mean of all extra efforts directed toward the leader (α = .71).

Most 75.5% (n = 379) participants read the ad and 43.8% (n = 218) of these provided written feedback. We used gSEM to analyze the direct and indirect effects of leader gender and WFC on follower extra effort via prosocial motivation. Leader WFC (b = .49, z = 2.19, p = .029) and leader gender (b = .71, z = 9.59, p < .001) predicted prosocial motivation. These effects were qualified by an interaction (b = -.36, z = -5.02, p < .001), such that high WFC predicted more prosocial motivation towards male leaders, yet prosocial motivation for female leaders remained high regardless of WFC. Mediation analyses revealed a positive indirect effect of leader WFC on follower extra effort, which was moderated by leader gender, such that the indirect effect was more positive for male leaders (effect = .02, SE_{boot} = .01, z = 4.93, 95% CI_{bc} .007 - .048) than for female leaders (effect = -.02, SE_{boot} = .008, z = 1.11, 95% CI_{bc} -.008 - .024). Results causally replicate and extend findings from Study 1.

DISCUSSION

Three studies outlined how upward evaluation processes shape follower perceptions of and reactions to leaders' WFC, including how these perceptions vary by leader gender and overtime, predicting downstream behavioral consequences. Results showed that followers noticed leaders' WFC but responded to it in a positive, prosocial manner–particularly for female leaders–although this gender gap closed when leaders worked overtime hours. This evidence reveals a behavioral bonus wherein lower-level evaluators exerted more extra effort and help towards leaders they viewed as experiencing higher levels of WFC.

Theoretically, these results extend existing empirical work on WFC, which has tested leaders' perceptions of followers' WFC in the typical (downward) direction of status and power relations in organizational hierarchies (Dosier et al., 1988) and is often grounded in gender or social role theories (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 2012). Specifically, we examined followers' perceptions of leaders' WFC, finding positive behavioral effects in the form of follower extra effort to help leaders. To show these behavioral effects of WFC perceptions, we integrated social exchange (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960) and prosocial motivation theories (Grant, 2007, 2008), which are less common in gender/diversity and WFC research.

Practically, conceptualizations of LMX and leadership (e.g., Liden & Maslyn, 1998; Felfe & Goihl, 2002) reveal that effective leadership results in followers' going above and beyond the formal requirements of their jobs. Our findings expand these, pointing to a non-work-related, arguably unintentional means through which leaders generate greater follower performance: followers' work and family-related leader observations. Future research can test if leaders notice these cross-domain connections (see Hammond, Clapp-Smith, & Palanski, 2017) or if long-term, follower extra effort may predict negative outcomes (e.g., exhaustion).

These results paint an optimistic picture of modern work relations: leaders receive help when they need somebody–and from not from just anybody–but from their followers.

REFERENCES AVAILABLE FROM THE AUTHORS.